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ABSTRACT

Information about the types of characteristics seen by parents and adolescents in similar fashion and those seen differently may result in better prediction of teenage behavior. To compare the perceptions of adolescents and adults on 20 personality characteristics, rating tables originally constructed by Hess and Goldblatt (1957) were given to 35 Hispanic and Anglo high school students, who took complementary forms home for their parents to complete. Results were analyzed for possible differences by age, sex, ethnicity, and family size. The differences between parent and adolescent views were much less extreme than the differences originally found by Hess and Goldblatt. No significant differences [illegible] age, sex, ethnicity, or family size were found. The findings indicate that parents and adolescents expect to be viewed much differently by the other group than they actually are viewed. (Author/JAC)

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Adolescents and Adults: Ratings and Expected Ratings of Themselves and Each Other

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While some researchers, most prominently Douvan and Adelson (1966) and Conger (1971) debunk the idea of adolescence as a period of 'storm and strife', there is still evidence suggesting the surfacing of enough disagreement and tension in parent-teen relationships to warrant continued study. For example, a study by Josselson, Greenberger, and McConochie (1977) found low maturity adolescents experienced "widespread friction and much yelling" in their relationships with parents. Okun and Sasfy (1977) found high attitudal agreement between parents and teens, but inconsistencies between teen attitudes and their behaviors.

Coleman expressed the view (in Rogers, 1969) that adolescents are apprehensive due to their uncertain status relative to adult society. In theoretical terms, this apprehension finds expression in Fishbein's equations for behaviors stemming from normative beliefs (1975), with the expectations of others as a highly significant component. One hypothesis derived from this theory is that if adolescents have highly erroneous views of their parents' expectations of them, their behaviors will seem normative to the adolescents, but could appear abnormal and disruptive to the parents.

This study looks at potential differences in expectations. Information concerning the types of characteristics seen by parents and teens in similar fashion and those seen differently could result in better prediction of teen behavior. Parents' understanding of the roots of teen behavior would improve and the potential for conflict would decrease.

This study is based upon a study with the goals just mentioned.

In 1957 Robert Hess and Irene Goldblatt surveyed 32 middle and upper-middle class adolescents and 54 of their parents. Each individual was asked to rate teens, adults, and how they would expect the opposite group to rate teens and adults. These ratings were made on twenty personality characteristics such as 'patient' and 'courteous' (the complete list can be found in Table 1). The characteristics were set up in bipolar, seven point scales.

Hess and Goldblatt predicted that virtually all characteristics would be rated differently by the teens and their parents. Instead, significant differences were found mainly in the expected ratings (especially how teens believed adults would rate them and how adults believed teens would rate themselves). Their major results can be summarized as follows:

1) Both teens and adults rated teens in a mildly favorable manner;
2) Both teens and adults rated adults as superior to teens;
3) Teens accentuated the relative superiority of adults over teens;
4) Teens expected adults to rate them unfavorably, while adults expected teens to rate themselves unrealistically highly.

The latter two findings suggest that teens and their parents have very different opinions on how they are viewed by the other group (Hess and Goldblatt termed this the 'expected reputation'). This difference in expected reputations is a potential source of miscommunication and misinterpretation of behaviors, leading to tension and conflict. Parents might view teens as needing to be 'put in their place'. Teens might believe that parents will see them in an unfavorable light no matter what they do, and will

act to 'live up to' this negative reputation.

The Hess and Goldblatt study did not consider response biases (since all items were cast from positive to negative), parental influences on teens in the home setting, or effects among working class subjects. Some sex differences were noted, but a complete analysis by sex or age was not considered.

A similar study was more recently conducted by Coleman, George, and Holt in England (1977), with working class adolescents and their mothers. The four major findings of the Hess and Goldblatt study were replicated by Coleman, et al. Sex differences were detected, but expected age differences did not occur.

Many studies of adolescent attitudes have found sex differences (Adelson, 1980; Barrett, 1977; Coleman, 1977; Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Heilbrun & Landauer, 1977). Some studies of attitudes have found age differences (Costanga & Shaw, cited by Coleman, 1977; Coleman, 1978; O'Donnell, 1979; Weller & Luchterhand, 1977), but age differences have been less consistently found than sex differences.

A variable of particular interest in Southern California is that of ethnic differences, particularly differences between Hispanics and Anglos. Few ethnic studies of adolescents include Hispanics.

Differences between Anglos and Hispanics have been reported over sociability (Knight & Kagan, 1977), marriage and family size expectations (Edington & Hays, 1978), and self-concepts (Hurstfield, 1978). Another study, conducted by Moerk (1972) on aspirations of Hispanics and Anglos in New Mexico, reported that differences found in 1967 had virtually disappeared by 1970.

In a fundamental sense, this study is a replication of Hess and Goldblatt (1957) and Coleman, George, and Holt (1977). Differences in time location, setting, and population allow a test of the generalizability of the earlier results. A more comprehensive analysis, including the testing for possible effects and interactions, is highly desirable.

The first hypothesis to be investigated is that the four findings of Hess and Goldblatt (replicated by Coleman, et al.) will be reconfirmed. Secondly, it is hypothesized that the variables of age, sex, and ethnicity will affect the views of adolescents. Thirdly, the variables of sex and family size will be sources of significant differences among the adult sample.

Method

Population

The teenage sample was randomly selected from the students of a Southern California high school at which the author has taught. The schools ethnic composition is 50-55% Hispanic and 40-45% Anglo. The students come from middle and working class families. Using the latest available class lists, a random sample of 35 freshmen and an equal number of juniors were selected. High rates of moving, absenteeism, and refusal led to a final survey group containing 36 students. The final group analyzed consisted of 24 Hispanics and 11 Anglos, a greater disparity than expected (one Samoan subject was dropped). There were 14 males and 21 females, 18 freshmen and 17 juniors.

The parents of these students constituted the adult portion of the study. The students were given parent surveys to take

home, with incentives given for the return of completed sueveys. Even with telephone reminders and visits to the homes, there was some difficulty in obtaining parent surveys due to lack of phones, language problems and the reluctance of some parents to have dealings with any institution. Eventually, completed forms were obtained from 26 mothers and 19 fathers (three of the mothers were living singly).

Procedure

The survey form contained the four tables used by Hess and Goldblatt, with two slight modifications. A pilot study given to a sophomore English class at the same high school showed comprehension problems resulted from the term 'frivolous' (in frivolous-serious), and the terms 'moral-immoral'. In this survey the term 'carefree' was substituted for 'frivolous', while 'honest-dishonest' was used instead of 'moral-immoral'. The casting of the characteristics in negative-positive or positive-negative ways was varied randomly.

The adolescents were sent an explanatory letter on a Monday, then were sent pass slips excusing them from their third period class (the most stable) on Wednesday (the day of highest attendance). The survey was conducted in the student union building, where it was expected that the students would feel most comfortable. At the conclusion of the survey the students were thanked and given the parent portion of the survey to take home and return.

Homes were visited of those parents whose surveys had not been returned to the school after 10 days. All parent surveys were

completed unsupervised. Neither adults nor adolescents were made aware of the specific hypotheses being tested.

Results

Parent-adolescent Comparisons

In the first step of the analysis, the mean value of each of the 20 characteristics for each of the four tables was computed, after converting all scores to a negative-positive direction. The overall means for the 35 adolescents and for the 45 parents were computed similar to the procedure used by Hess and Goldblatt, in order to compare results.

All items were compared with the neutral value of 4.00 to determine the number of characteristics above or below 4.00 on each table. This number is used in evaluating many of the hypotheses Finally, significant differences ($p < .05$) between adolescent responses (the odd numbered columns of Table 1) and parent responses (the even numbered columns) were computed by use of the t-test. The significance of these differences is indicated on Table 1 by asterisks between the columns compared (all significant differences were in the expected direction).

Adolescents rated teens moderately favorably; 17 of the 20 characteristics were rated over 4.00 and the overall mean was 4.23. In comparason, the parents rated teens slightly unfavorably; the overall mean was 3.94, and half of the characteristics were rated below 4.00 There were only two differences between adolescent and parent responses which reached the .05 level of significance.

Adolescents rated adults higher than they rated teens; the overall mean was 4.79. The parents also rated adults higher than

they had rated teens: The overall mean was 4.63. Only one difference reached the .05 level of significance.

The difference between the adolescents' overall mean ratings of adults and teens was 0.56 units. The parents rated the adults 0.69 units higher overall than they rated teens. Both of these differences are significant at the .05 level.

The adolescents expected adults to rate teens somewhat unfavorably: only three characteristics were rated above 4.00, and the overall mean for this column was 3.61. The parents did not expect teens to rate themselves extraordinarily favorably (overall mean was 4.49), only two characteristics were rated above 5.00.

The adolescents expected the adults to rate themselves highly, with 17 characteristics receiving ratings above 5.00, and the overall mean equaling 5.17. The parents expected teens to rate adults favorably (with an overall mean of 4.58).

As Table 1 indicates, many more differences between adolescent and parent responses reached significance in the expectations columns. There were 13 significant differences between how adolescents expected adults to rate teens and how parents expected teens to rate themselves (columns 5 and 6). Six of these were significant at the .001 level. There were 10 significant differences between the expectations of adolescents on adults rating themselves and how parents expected teens to rate adults (columns 7 and 8). Half of these were significant at the .001 level. Eight characteristics showed significant differences in both of the above comparasons.

Effects of Demographic Variables

The second and third hypotheses concerning the relationships between ratings and demographic characteristics were examined through the use of a multivariate analysis of variance program (MANOVA).

The adolescents' responses were analyzed for differences by grade, sex, and ethnicity (Hispanic and Anglo). The results revealed that none of the unbiased MANOVA tests (tests with other effects held constant) were significant at even the .05 level, for any of the tables tested. None of the biased tests approached significance either, and none of the interactions were significant. There were not even any discernable patterns in these effects across the tables tested.

A similar situation existed for the parent responses. There were no significant effects for sex or family size with either unbiased or biased tests. The interaction did not approach significance, and again no patterns emerged.

Discussion

While the outcome of this study differed somewhat from Hess and Goldblatt, their major findings were generally replicated, lending support for the hypothesis that adolescents and parents have differing expectations of how the other group perceives them. Hess and Goldblatt found that both adolescents and parents rated teens slightly favorably (with 13 or more of the 20 characteristics rated over 4.00), but only the adolescents in this study rated teens favorably (on 17 characteristics). The parents rated the teens slightly unfavorably (only 10 characteristics were rated

over 4.00), but the differences between the mean of the Hess and Goldblatt study (4.27) and this study (3.94) is less than .2 standard deviations, not a substantial difference.

The second major finding of the previous study was also replicated. The current study found adolescents rated adults as superior to teens on 19 of 20 characteristics, and the parents rated adults as superior on all 20. The comparable findings of Hess and Goldblatt were 20 out of 20 for adolescents and 19 out of 20 for the parents. Both studies definitely confirm that both adolescents and parents perceive parents as somewhat superior to teens on these characteristics.

The third finding of Hess and Goldblatt was not replicated. While they found that the difference between adult and teen ratings made by adolescents was substantially larger than the comparable difference in parent ratings, 1.22 units versus 0.59 units, in this study the reverse was actually found to be true (0.56 versus 0.69 units). The chief source for this reversal appears to be the lack of an extreme rating given to adults by adolescents, as was the case in the previous study (5.60 compared to 4.79 of this study).

Although the patterns of means were similar in the two studies, Hess and Goldblatt found more variability in the ratings. A possible source for this difference is the neutrality of the school site as opposed to the home setting. Cultural differences might also be a factor.

The final, and most important, of the findings of Hess and Goldblatt, that adolescents would expect adults to rate teens

unfavorably and that parents would expect teens to rate themselves unrealistically highly, was also supported in direction but not in degree. The adolescents in the Hess/Goldblatt study expected much poorer ratings from adults (mean of 2.80) than the adolescents in this study (mean of 3.61). The parents, however, did not expect the teens to have unrealistically high opinions of themselves; (Hess and Goldblatt reported an overall mean of 5.51, compared to an overall mean of 4.49 in this study).

On the other hand, the many significant differences found in the expectations columns support the idea that there are "perceptual distortions by both groups in predicting the response of the other group", as stated by Hess and Goldblatt. Significant differences were found for the majority of the characteristics on these two tables. These tests strongly support the notion of perceptual differences between adolescents and their parents.

One implication of perceptual differences is that parents and adolescents interpret teen behaviors in different, often contradictory, ways, with tension and conflict a potential result.

The second and third hypotheses, positing the existence of differences by sex, age, ethnicity, and family size are most simply discussed by stating that no such differences were detected in this study. Nothing approached significance, and no patterns emerged.

A possibility for the lack of demographic effects is that these effects might be too small to be detected by the small samples used here. Two groups of 35 persons each would need to differ by over one standard deviation to provide a power of .80, or a difference of over 1.0 units on the scales used, much higher than

any difference evaluated. To detect a moderate effect (one-half standard deviation) with a power of .80, a sample size of 66 would be needed (all computations are from formulas in Kirk, 1968, page 109). Thus there is a possibility that moderate demographic effects exist, but that they are not large enough to be detected by this small study.

The lack of patterns in the size of effects provides another argument against the existence of effects. These results are consistent with other studies in failing to detect age, sex, ethnicity, or family size effects (e.g., Coleman, 1977; Moerk, 1972).

This study has confirmed that parents and adolescents expect to be viewed much differently by the other group than they actually are viewed. In living up (or down) to these expectations, or in evaluating behaviors from these differing (and distorted) perceptual bases, tension and conflict could result. Parents and adolescents in Southern California appear to form their own homogenous groups. Each group rates the other in very similar fashion. If adolescents and parents could become more aware of this similarity of views, as well as those areas in which their expectations of each other differ, adolescent-parent relationships could become much smoother. The potential for reducing stereotyping and the improvement of family relationships are, perhaps, the most important reasons for continuing research in the area of adolescent/adult perceptions.

Table 1

Characteristic	(1) Adoles. Rating Teens	(2) Parent Rating Teens	(3) Adoles. Rating Adults	(4) Parent Rating Adults	(5) Adoles. Expctn Adults Rating Teens	(6) Parent Expctn Teens Rating Teens	(7) Adoles. Expctn Adults Rating Adults	(8) Parent Expctn Teens Rating Adults
1. Untidy-Neat		-		-		***		*
2. Impatient-Patient		-		-		***		***
3. Uncooperative-Cooperative		*		-		***		**
4. Carefree-Serious		-		-		-		-
5. Irresponsible-Responsible		-		-		***		-
6. Rude-Courteous		-		-		**		***
7. Immature-Mature		**		-		*		-
8. Impulsive-Cautious		-		-		*		*
9. Inconsistent-Consistent		-		-		*		-
10. Ungrateful-Grateful		-		-		**		***
11. Unreliable-Reliable		-		-		*		***
12. Unstable-Stable		-		-		-		-
13. Dishonest-Honest		-		*		***		-
14. Easily Inflnced -Selfdirctd		-		-		-		-
15. Disrespectful -Respectful		-		-		***		-
16. Spoiled-Unspoiled		-		-		-		*
17. Inconsiderate -Considerate		-		-		-		*
18. Wild-Self-controld		-		-		*		-
19. Thoughtless-Thoughtful		-		-		*		-
20. Angry-Loving		-		-		-		-
Overall means	4.23	3.94	4.79	4.63	3.61	4.49	5.17	4.58

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

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